

# George Dent Nursery School

Elms Road, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 7PY

**Inspection dates** 11–12 February 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- Children make outstanding progress in all areas of their learning. From below expected starting points for many, they reach standards that are typically expected for their age and an increasingly large proportion achieve beyond this.
- This is because teaching is also outstanding. Teachers are highly effective in observing children at play and at recognising their individual interests. They use this knowledge to provide exciting and stimulating activities that move children on to learn new things every single day.
- Teamwork is very strong. The dedicated staff work together extremely well. They make sure that every minute of learning time counts.
- The outdoor learning area is a real paradise for youngsters of this age range. Teachers make very good use of it to nurture children's independence and curiosity, and develop a full range of skills including those needed when solving problems.
- Children enjoy running about, balancing on climbing equipment, logs and stilts, exploring the maze, building dens and finding out about minibeasts living among the fallen leaves and branches.
- Children swiftly learn tolerance and respect for one another. Staff frequently help them to celebrate cultural diversity. This means that these very young children begin to develop those values that prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- Attendance is lower than it should be because not all parents ensure that children come to school every day.
- Parents speak very highly of the school. They typically comment that the school is a truly special place. They say staff are very approachable and they particularly appreciate the weekly hand-out giving information on nursery activities.
- Children's behaviour is outstanding and they are exceptionally safe in school. Staff create a very happy and calm learning environment. Children learn that their opinions and preferences are valued and that they will always be listened to. Equally they learn that it is important to listen to one another and to follow adults' instructions carefully because this keeps them safe.
- Leadership is outstanding because leaders and governors are completely dedicated to making sure that children receive the best provision possible. They leave no stone unturned that could lead to further improvements. As a result, the school is dynamic and constantly improving. This is seen in the recent improvements in how teachers develop children's awareness of patterns in sound that is helping them learn to read and write.
- Leaders make sure that their outstanding practice is shared with other local and regional providers of early years education through engaging in a partnership with the local authority and a local group of schools. They support many other providers in ensuring that children in the area are ready to join Reception classes in primary schools.
- Governors support the school effectively. They are well informed about the school's strengths and priorities for further improvement and ensure the school gives excellent value for money.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and independent, continuous learning; nine staff were seen.
- Discussions were held with parents, three members of the governing body and school staff. A telephone conversation took place with a local authority representative.
- The inspector took account of the responses of 25 parents who completed the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and four staff surveys.
- A range of documents were looked at, including the school's information on children's progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Janette Corlett, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is a similar sized nursery compared to other nursery schools nationally. It has places for 158 children attending part time. Children are generally admitted to nursery in the term following their third birthday.
- The school recently opened a funded provision on site for children who are aged between two and three. The setting will receive its own inspection and the report will be published on the Ofsted website.
- Most children are of White British heritage and a very few children speak English as an additional language.
- Typically, a very small minority of children attend who are disabled or have special educational needs.
- The nursery works in partnership with BrandH Academy Trust. The nursery contracts with the trust for some leadership services, including those of the Executive Headteacher. A nursery governor is an associate governor on the governing body of the academy trust.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance by making sure that parents understand that it is very important for children to come to school regularly, unless they are ill, in order for them to learn as much as they can and develop good attendance habits before moving into primary school.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are outstanding

- The executive headteacher and head of school have developed a unique, whole school atmosphere of early years excellence that has maintained the outstanding effectiveness of the nursery for over 15 years. Their relentless insistence on the importance of building stimulating learning experiences based on children's individual interests means that the school continues to provide an outstanding education for all its children, including those who are disabled and have special educational needs.
- The school's procedures for gaining an accurate view of its performance are thorough, including those to check on the quality of teaching. Checks on the performance of all staff are rigorous and lead to staff receiving high quality training to help them develop their practice and become even better at helping children to achieve to the very best of their ability. The impact of this is seen particularly in the exceptional skills staff have in observing children's learning and planning for their future progress.
- The curriculum is outstanding because it is flexible and is continually adapted to meet the individual needs and interests of the children, whatever their levels of ability. For example, a teacher observed children commenting on an object feeling cold when it touched their cheeks. She skilfully followed this up with a series of opportunities for children to experiment with a range of different materials and extend their vocabulary to include many different ways of describing textures and sensations. This 'learning story' was made into a beautiful book to share with children, parents and other members of staff.
- The curriculum also makes a strong contribution towards children's outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Children learn about different cultures through celebrating, for example, the Chinese New Year and Diwali. During the inspection, groups of children enjoyed responding to Chinese music with their own enthusiastic instrumental performance. They then took turns in being the head of the dragon as they dipped and dived in a rhythmic dragon dance.
- Staff are very good at spotting when children are being particularly kind to one another, for example, when they are taking turns, listening carefully to one another and sharing toys and games. As a result, children know right from wrong and know that the very few rules are there to make sure that everyone is safe and having a happy time in nursery. Leaders are laying a firm foundation for the children's future life in modern Britain.
- A class teacher carries out the middle leadership role effectively. Her responsibilities include supporting the continuing professional development of staff and leading the highly successful partnership with the local authority and other schools to increase the range and quality of learning opportunities for children in the early years phase in the local and regional areas. The impact of this work is seen in the exceptionally high level of skills of all nursery staff and consistently outstanding teaching.
- The school's approach of knowing each child as an individual and giving expertly tailored support for their learning means that all children, including those who are most able, are given an equal opportunity to succeed without any fear of discrimination. The very few children who speak English as an additional language are well supported and swiftly learn to chatter with their friends as they play and learn together.
- Relationships with parents are strong. There are daily opportunities for parents bringing children into school and collecting them at the end of the session to have a word with their child's key worker if there are any concerns. Parents are involved very successfully as partners in their child's learning. The school sends out weekly information letting parents know the activities going on in the nursery that week. The letter also gives parents and childminders the opportunity to respond and let nursery staff know the things that the children have been doing outside of nursery. These responses are highly valued by nursery staff in helping them to plan for future learning opportunities.
- The local authority provides effective but light touch support for this outstanding school. For example, the local authority has supported the school in checking on the accuracy of teachers' assessments.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors bring a wide range of professional experience to their roles. They have a very good understanding of the different areas of learning in the early years curriculum and this means that they are able to fully challenge school leaders on the outcomes for children.
  - Governors receive regular updates from the executive headteacher on progress towards the priorities in the school development plan, the quality of teaching and how well different groups of children are progressing. They are well informed on the school's arrangements for managing the performance of teachers, including that of the executive headteacher and the head of school. They fully understand the link between the outcomes for children and staff pay progression. They also understand the need to tackle underperformance but they have not had to contend with this in any way in recent times.
  - Governors ensure that the arrangements to protect children and keep them safe are effective. Safe

guarding and safe practices not only meet requirements but go beyond that in all respects. Financial management arrangements are secure.

## **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are outstanding

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Youngsters from their very earliest days in the nursery move happily and seamlessly from one activity into another. This is because staff have established routines that are designed to allow children to choose the things that they would like to do but at the same time have made clear their high expectations of the way children should treat one another and the adults who care for them. There is always so much going on that children rarely misbehave because they are enjoying themselves too much and are eager to try something new.
- All this means that children are enthusiastic learners, ready to have a go at new things and join in with the fun. Their laughter is a constant and delightful feature of the indoor and outdoor areas. Teachers' infectious enthusiasm and obvious pleasure in helping the children learn create a highly stimulating environment that captivates children's imagination.
- Children soon learn to sort out minor squabbles between themselves and they understand the importance of respecting one another's differences. They support one another very well. For example, a small group of children operating a hairdressing salon in one role play area knew that they had to make an appointment and wait for their turn to sit under the dryer. There are no recorded incidents of bullying or racism.
- The majority of children attend school every day unless they are poorly because they enjoy it so much. However, a small number of families do not always remember how important it is for children to develop good attendance habits from the very earliest stage in their school life. As a result, their children sometimes miss out on valuable learning time.

### **Safety**

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Children move very sensibly around the building and outdoor area. There are two big staircases to navigate, and children are very careful to hold on to the banisters, take one step at a time and never to push anyone. Through this and through the range of adventurous activities outdoors they demonstrate that they understand how to keep themselves safe and to manage risk.
- Children happily race around on their bicycles and ride on toys, but know that they must always wear their cycling helmets and take great pride in being able to fasten the chin straps on these by themselves. They have many hours of physical activity outdoors every week and this helps them develop good habits in keeping themselves fit as well as leading to their outstanding progress in physical development.
- School leaders and managers ensure that the buildings and outdoor areas are very safe and secure. They carry out risk assessments on all the learning areas every day to make sure that there are no hazards for children. Children feel safe and demonstrate this through their confidence in the teachers and excellent relationships with all the adults in the school. Their parents agree and typically comment on how well the staff care for the children and how reassuring this is for them.

## **The quality of teaching** is outstanding

- Teaching is consistently outstanding and has been so over time. All staff have an excellent understanding of how young children learn and use this to provide the very best of experiences for children of all ability levels, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs.
- Adults show real enthusiasm and excitement in learning and constantly offer children praise and encouragement to gain their confidence. As a result, children swiftly develop a high level of self-esteem and become very independent learners. For example, in one session, children created a magic show complete with a wizard who could make rabbits disappear in and out of hats. The teacher joined in as a part of the audience in the role play, marvelling at the magic and at the same time taking every opportunity to enrich the children's vocabulary.
- An important strength in the teaching is the way that adults know exactly when to intervene in children's play to help them to extend their thinking, but equally know when to stand back and let the children continue with their own investigations.
- Teachers plan for experiences that immediately capture children's interests. For example, children decided

to use the overhead projector that staff had set up to encourage them to perform with the shadow puppets that they had made. They developed a marvellous story about a spider living in a castle who eats baby flowers until the big flowers turn him into a kind spider and 'they all live happily ever after'.

- Questions are used especially well to encourage children to think deeply and extend their vocabulary. A teacher helped a group of children to mix paint. They wanted to make green paint and they were allowed to experiment until they found the right colour combination. They then wanted to paint a green frog and the teacher took this as an opportunity to ask them what they thought frogs looked like, how many legs they had, and if their legs were long or short.
- Adult's knowledge of the needs of each individual child is accurately based on highly-skilled, careful observations and the continuous tracking of their progress. This means that children of all abilities, including those who are more able, receive the correct type of support that they need to make outstanding progress. In one activity, children found a magic door that might lead to a treasure chest. The teacher extended the activity to include making a book about the story and then helped them with writing some captions to go with the pictures. The children's eagerness to complete the book explains why their progress in developing writing skills is so strong.
- Teachers share information about children's interests and progress exceptionally well with one another and with parents. Consequently, teachers' plans for activities are powerful tools that build on children's experiences at school and at home. They identify the next small steps in children's learning and make the most of every opportunity to accelerate their progress.

### The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Most children enter the nursery with skills that are below those typically expected, especially in relation to language and communication and some elements of their personal and social development. By the time they are ready to move on to primary school, almost all children are working securely within the age-related expectations for all areas of learning and a significant and increasing minority of children are exceeding them.
- Progress is outstanding because teachers make sure every single day that no time is ever wasted and children can move on and rapidly learn new skills.
- Progress in personal and social skills is particularly swift because teachers show children how to listen carefully and encourage them to express their preferences and offer their opinions. Children imitate this and learn how to deal with situations where they have to take turns. They understand that they cannot always expect that others will always agree with their choices and that they sometimes have to compromise.
- Opportunities for reading are abundant throughout the nursery. Children frequently share books and love listening to stories and nursery rhymes and this supports the excellent progress of all children, including the most able, in this area. In one session, children enjoyed the 'Owl Babies' story and then donned owl costumes and acted the story out while the teacher read the story to them again. Such encouragement to develop a real love of books sets the children off on a flying start to their journey of becoming competent readers.
- Children's rapid development of reading skills is also supported by the nursery's recently improved approach to the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make). Children receive short and focused sessions that encourage them to listen to different sounds, such as clapping and patting, and then to explore patterns in sound. This is the first stage in introducing them to initial letter sounds and patterns in words. Teachers gradually build on this so that the most able children can frequently recognise simple words and phrases.
- Opportunities for writing are similarly well promoted. For example, in the outdoor police station, children have a range of writing materials and enjoy writing 'crime report forms' and taking 'fingerprints' within their role play.
- Children's development of simple skills in mathematical calculations and understanding shape, space and measures is strong because they have many resources to help them learn to count, to explore shapes and to measure. The outdoor area is just as rich in these resources as are the classrooms. For example, numbers to 20 placed strategically around the garden were used when children acted as postal workers and delivered Christmas letters. Equally, teachers bring counting activities into as many activities as possible. Even selecting a track from a CD gave children the opportunity to count up to the right number and to think about what number would come before or after.
- The school's nurturing environment is particularly effective in making sure that children with disabilities and special educational needs are well supported and make the same outstanding progress as their

friends.

## What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	113983
<b>Local authority</b>	Darlington
<b>Inspection number</b>	449530

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Nursery
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–5
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	115
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Steven Harker
<b>Headteacher</b>	Neil Parker
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21 June 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01325 380802
<b>Fax number</b>	Not applicable
<b>Email address</b>	admin@georgedent.darlington.sch.uk

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